

To Have and To Hold

by Saffron stepsister of Evil

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entwine

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> Author: Saffron, Angsty step-sister of Evil
 Email Address:
saffronlai@aol.com

> Distribution: my archive, and if you want it, well...
 Feedback:
Yes, please!

> Summary: Xander discusses his feelings for Buffy with the only
other person who could understand: Angel. Angst. Character Death.
Maybe even two or three or four, I'm kind of in a sullen, angsty,
take my anger out in creative ways mood right now.
 Disclaimer:
No, Angel & Xander are not mine. Buffy and the rest of the Sunnydale
crew are not mine either--they belong to the incredibly twisted deity
that is Joss Whedon and his legal cohorts.

> Spoilers: A small one for Becoming II, rehashes several events from
Seasons I and II. Scott Hope makes a small insignificant
appearance.
 Rating: R, dark depressing themes, implied suicide.
Mildly sexual content. In other words, not fluff but gloom and doom
aplenty! Danger, Will Robinson!

> Author Notes: Inspired partly by the Depeche Mode song of the same
name, and Sandra Schimmel's beautiful Xander revelation piece, "Final
Face". I bow in awe. Oh, and this is my first posting and written
rather off the top of my head--do tell me what you think.

>
 The last words she had said to him were "Let me go."

>
 That was a week ago.

>
 Today, he was burying her--putting the great love of his young
life in the cold hard ground, where she would only have insects and
the other dead to keep her company.

>
 Horribly ironic, really.

>
 Just as sure as destiny was in choosing the Slayer, she
dictated the Slayer's death to be of unnatural causes. Buffy,
iconoclast to the very end, had died in a car crash. And a car crash

was surely more natural than vampires, demons, or other things that went bump in the night.

>
 To his right, Willow was sobbing hysterically, clinging to Oz--who could only murmur words of comfort and bow his head silently for a girl he had just begun to know. Joyce was standing across from him, the tracks of her tears still visible on her rapidly aging face--she had nearly collapsed when she found out. Standing on shaky legs, she leaned against Giles for support. The librarian barely noticed her presence, for his entire focus was on the small (God, was Buffy really that petite?) oak coffin that was being lowered into the yawning gap in the soil. Xander could see the older man's lips moving slightly and he didn't need to guess what was being said. Giles was saying goodbye.

>
 All around him, mourners shuffled by--and slowly, hesitantly, they began to throw roses into the grave. Roses of all colors, red, white, yellow and pink flew onto a rapidly growing pile. Willow, her face still red and flushed from crying, stepped forward--and for a minute Xander had an irrational fear that the petite redhead would fling herself into the pit. That fear quickly went away as she slowly knelt and placed a single white lily on top of the rose bed. Willow lingered for a moment, her slim white hand caressing the flower before abruptly breaking away for the comfort of Oz's hug. The ruffled blonde guitarist silently held her, as she broke down once more.

>
 The sight of his childhood friend being comforted in the arms of another man would have originally bothered him deeply--sent him into a blinding rage, actually~but he had let go of her long ago. He had let her go when he realized that *she* had ruined him for anyone else--made him incapable of loving anyone else as deeply and fiercely as he had her.

>
 Not even the brunette beauty that held his hand in a iron grip could erase her effect. Cordelia Chase stared at the small clumps of dirt that were now beginning to rain onto the coffin, as the undertakers began to cover up what was left of her friend, once rival. But as she lifted her eyes to study his face, her heart ached just a little to see the burning intensity in those deep brown eyes. Xander had not cried a single tear through the entire ceremony. She squeezed his hand in a comforting gesture. He didn't notice when she firmly pulled him away.

>
 As they walked away, the sky rumbled overhead, seeming to correspond with the down mood. Fat drops of water began to pummel on the rapidly scurrying funeral procession, umbrellas materializing somehow out of thin air--Cordelia ran, dragging Xander with her.

> "Looks like God is crying for Buffy, too, huh?" A feeble joke, but it had prompted him to smile a little...Cordelia sighed.
 It was going to be a very long night.

>
 The rain had lasted for two hours, the furious downpour fading into something resembling a summer shower within the last half hour. Xander stalked through the dewy grass, cutting away at any clinging shrubbery with his slicked umbrella. He had one more final reason, one more confrontation he needed to make before he could say goodbye. As he neared the familiar grounds, he could see the dark figure crouched over the newly grassed over earth. Xander walked faster.

>
 Angel didn't turn when he heard the footsteps steadily approaching him. He already knew who it was. It was Xander that spoke first.

>
 "Have you been here all this time?"

> Angel growled low in his throat. The vampire's black trench was drenched to him like a second skin, and there were visible droplets dotting his hair--obviously Xander was making small talk.

"Xander--even you are not that dense. Cut the small talk and just tell me why you're here...even though I have a pretty good idea why."

> "Oh really, Angel?" Before the words were fully out of his mouth, Angel had leapt up and grabbed him by the lapels. The vampire leaned closer, his knuckles tightening on the fabric.
 "Did you know I felt her when she died?"

> Xander's frame went rigid slightly, but otherwise he gave no indication of visible agitation.
 Angel pressed on, in an almost conversational tone.

> "And do you know what was going on in her mind as she died? You. You insignificant little bastard--she was worried that she had hurt you somehow! Now what I want to know is, what *did* you say to her last week that made her so upset?" Angel's eyes glowed a dull amber before brightening into full-fledged golden orbs, his face shifting and stretching to his vampiric visage. He leaned closer.
 "You know, before it was always Buffy that restrained me from killing you. Or Willow. But now that Buffy's gone, and Willow's not here," Angel's voice dropped into a deadly snarl, "I don't think I'll have that problem, soul or no soul."

>
 If Angel was expecting fear or remorse on the younger man's face--he didn't get it. Instead, Xander tilted his head aside so that the column of his neck faced the vampire's fangs.

>
 A weird and broken laugh forced its way out of Xander, sounded harsh and unnatural in the still night air. Startled, Angel loosened his grip so that Xander stumbled back, falling onto the wet grass in an ungainly heap. And kept laughing that horrible laugh--the one poised between hysteria and despair. It shook through his lanky frame until he was gasping for air, the laughter turning rapidly into anguished keening.

>
 Angel let the boy weep for a moment before he reached out and backhanded him. The force of it threw Xander a few feet from where he had been sitting, knocking him onto his back. A coppery smelling wetness invaded his senses, mixing with the salty after taste of his tears. Xander swallowed a half sob as he brought up a shaky hand to wipe the blood off his face. A crimson smear awarded his efforts.

>
 "What the hell are you doing?"

>
 Through his reddened fingers, Xander could see that Angel had restrained himself at the sight of blood--his human facade was firmly in place. Struggling to get to his feet, Xander sat up and checked to make sure nothing was broken before standing up wearily.

> His face was a mess of tears and halfheartedly wiped smears of blood--but as Xander gazed steadily in the eyes of his old rival, Angel flinched as if he had been brandishing a cross. When Xander spoke, it was in a detached, hoarse tone.
 "I was making it easier for you to kill me...I thought that was obvious."

>
 Angel knew that voice, he had used it many times before in the early days of the curse -- but to hear it now coming out of Xander's mouth, was unsettling.

> Had the boy really sunk that low? The vampire chuckled humorlessly.
 "I think I can manage without your help, Xander." Looking down at the stamped grass around them, Angel gazed reverently at the rough wooden marker that served as Buffy's gravestone until the real one was in place. His hand snuck out tentatively to touch the rough grain, his heart crying out that not even a marble statue crafted by Michaelangelo would do her justice. Turning to look at Xander, Angel spoke calmly. "I'm not going to kill you--we're going to have a talk about what happened with Buffy...and why you're carrying around a gun."

>
 It was Xander's turn to flinch. His hand snaked down to his

inner coat pocket. The gun was still there, cool and solid against his fevered flesh. He lifted half crazed eyes to Angel's solemn brown ones--and Angel answered his unspoken question.

>
 "Vampires are particularly sensitive creatures--our sight, our hearing..." Angel smiled his famous half-smile, "our taste in food." Jerking his finger at the hidden gun, "When you were on the ground, your coat fell open a little. I saw what looked like a holster--and just guessed." Angel's smirk deepened into a frown.

> "What exactly are you planning with that thing? Last time I checked, Sunnydale's mugging rate is non-existent. You'd be better off with a stake. Of course, there are other reasons..." The older man paused, studying Xander intently.

> Xander's tears had dried along with the blood, leaving a interesting brown criss cross pattern on his pale face. It was his expression that held Angel in thrall however. Desperation was etched deeply in the young man's face--that and guilt. Xander swallowed, uncomfortable underneath Angel's stare.
 The way Angel was looking at him, as if *he* understood everything--made Xander's skin crawl.

>
 He felt angry suddenly. Angel's one hooded glance set off his emotions like firecrackers--red hot rage bubbled through his veins, helpless rage for Buffy's death, for his own inability to save her--his anger was so powerful that it radiated from him in hostile waves. He spoke without thinking, spitting out the words.

>
 "I never wanted to fall in love with her!"

>
 Xander looked down at the grass, absently making a design in the ground with the tip of his shoe. His voice shook. "But I couldn't help it--when I saw her, I just, just *knew*."

>
 Angel nodded sympathetically--he had felt the same way.

> "Did she remind you of the sun?" He cocked his head to one side, in a wistful gesture.

> Buffy, as she was before~appeared before his mind's eye, her golden hair streaming around her, the light catching the sparkle in her blue green eyes--that light seeping into her smile as well. She was so full of life, it had hurt to look at her--for everything he had missed about being alive was represented in her being.

> A snort answered the vampire's question.

> "The sun? No, Buffy was more than the sun...she was everything that I was missing in Sunnydale."

> "Like what?"

> "You know what it's like to be thought of a failure by nearly everyone in town? My parents...when they're home, barely notice my presence. Ditto with the teachers--I'm just always 'Xander the class clown.' Only Jesse and Willow understood...and Jesse died." Xander swallowed, the memory of having killed Jesse, even accidentally, still hurt. Clenching his fists, the youth paced restlessly over the damp ground~his confession tumbling out of him as easily as if he was talking about the weather.

> "And then I saw her, and everything seemed different somehow. She didn't know about me, about my past--none of the embarrassing things I've done..." Xander's voice trailed off as he absently studied the wooden marker as Angel had done.
 "I didn't think it would end this way--not like this. Not her."

>
 "She didn't deserve to die. But I don't think I need to tell you that bad things happen to good people."

>
 Xander turned on the vampire, his dark brown eyes blazing. "You don't understand! She shouldn't have died--she wouldn't have been in that car with Scott if I hadn't fought with her. Don't you understand...." Xander's voice reached an unnaturally high pitch then crashed down in a sob. "I killed her! Buffy's dead because I couldn't

control myself!" Breaking down completely, Xander slumped to the ground, shoulders shaking under the strain.

>
 Angel had stiffened at the mention of Scott Hope's name--after he had come back, Buffy admitted she had started seeing someone, but, she quickly added that she would end it immediately. He had been waiting for her to return to his apartment when the phone call, the one that he *never* wished to hear came. It was the first time he had heard Giles cry.

>
 And now, the old wounds resurfaced with the mention of a boy he hadn't met--did he die as well? Angel pushed the morbid thought out of his head and forced himself to look at Xander. He hadn't moved from his huddled position on the ground, only now he was rocking back and forth, muttering to himself. Angel's preternatural hearing could make out faint whisperings of, "Shouldn't have pushed her so hard...didn't want her with him..."

>
 Hesitantly, Angel felt out Xander's mind--it had been an ability he had picked up in Hell, as a last-ditch effort to preserve his own sanity. Unfortunately, the demons dealing with him had no thoughts for him to use as protection ~ slowly, their emptiness and instinctive need to harm had consumed his fragile mind. It was only until the familiar urge to protect Buffy flared up his memories and he was whole again. He hadn't had any visions since...no, he had one last fleeting look into Buffy's thoughts as she died...a shudder ran through him. Best not to go *there* just right now.

>
 Gritting his teeth, Angel closed his eyes and plunged into Xander's thoughts.

> What he saw shocked him. Xander's mind was utterly black and chaotic, quick streaks of silver interspersed with bright granules of color flew by Angel, then faded back into inky black. It took the vampire a few minutes to realize that the streaks were actually memories...he could make out Willow's face in a couple of them. He focused harder.

> Visions of Cordelia floated by, a fuzzy view of Xander and Willow as children...something about a Barbie doll? Angel frowned and moved on. There. Right in front of him stood Buffy, vibrant and shimmering - a vision in the sunlight. It surrounded her, giving her an ethereal glow. Angel felt his heart constrict at the sight. She smiled at him crookedly, brushing away the long strands of light brown hair that gently curled around her face.

> "I'm Buffy, I'm new." Angel stared at her, confused--then in shock, as his mouth opened and "Xander. Is, is me. Hi." came out.
 "Um, thanks." Buffy looked at him oddly then to Angel's surprise, began to fade, until only a faint outline remained. Angel blinked, and the vision was gone.

>
 "No, wait!" Angel stopped himself, as the realization hit him. That must have been Xander's first meeting with Buffy--it had been disconcerting actually becoming Xander, though. Angel shook his head ruefully, vowing to be careful where he treaded next. It was startling how easily he had melded with the mortal...a little *too* easily. A grimace creased his handsome features as he thought of what Xander had said.

>
 "Xander? Is me?"

>
 Shaking his head in disbelief, the vampire pressed further. Drat the boy, Angel cursed. If Xander had only been more forthcoming with his answers, he wouldn't have had to resort to mind reading. There was always a danger of being completely absorbed by the resident physce...Angel shuddered at the implications *that* union detailed. Closing his eyes, the vampire tried to regain a sense of calm concentration.

>
 Someone was gripping his arm. Tightly. Angel opened his eyes

and saw that he was in another cemetery, purple haze seeping across the ground, obscuring most of the gravestones. Irritably, he turned to look down at his hanger-on. Willow looked up at him, fear and anxiety shining in her large eyes.

> "Xander, I'm so scared." The redhead's grip became tighter, Angel winced as her fingernails dug into his skin.
 "Willow, please!"

> Instantly contrite, Willow relaxed her hold on his arm. "Oops, sorry Xander. It's just that...oh my God, no!"
 Giles appeared in front of them. The librarian's back was towards them, his figure bowed in grief. As Angel drew closer, he realized that Giles was kneeling in front of a freshly erected tombstone, partly covering it with his trench coat. At the sound of his footsteps, the Watcher turned to look at him, finally revealing the name etched on the tombstone.

>
 BUFFY SUMMERS, 1981~1997

>
 Angel stood frozen, his thoughts rapidly tripping over one another in half-hysterical ramblings. Buffy died before the Master? When *was* this? And why hadn't she ever told him--he should have been there, should have protected her...his train of thought was cut off as Willow screamed.

>
 Giles was on his feet again, and standing there dusting the dirt off her pale blue jacket nonchalantly, was Buffy. Except something was horribly wrong...Buffy looked up, pale golden eyes flickering at him expectantly. She wore the face of a vampire.

>
 The unexpected bolt of lust that rushed through him caught Angel by surprise. Even as a vampire, Buffy was startlingly beautiful--the normal planes of her face fleshed out in sensuous ridges, and her pouty mouth now smiled with fangs. She looked like him. All predatory grace and sexual appeal. Belatedly, Angel chastised himself for his impure thoughts. Feeling the body he was currently possessing tingle with surprise and barely repressed desire, he hid a smirk. If this was one of Xander's fantasies about Buffy...

>
 "Buffy, your face!" Willow had managed to break out of her trance.

>
 Buffy stopped smiling as her hands flew up to inspect the damage. Eyes widening in realization, then horror--the former Slayer quickly averted her face, stepping away from them.

>
 She's afraid. Of herself. Of me.

>
 "Buffy?" Hesitantly, he moved toward her.

>
 Her reaction was immediate and defensive.

> "Don't look at me!"
 But I want to, Angel pleaded silently. I want to, always. Oh, Buffy...

>
 A bright red streak flew by his eyes, blocking out his vision. He was suddenly wrenched from the situation, and hovering in inky blackness again.

> Mildly disoriented, Angel tried to recap what had happened.

Apparently, Xander had this fantasymemory of Buffy becoming a vampire and...was that a shoe floating in space? Squinting, Angel could clearly see that it was indeed a shoe--a strappy white satin dress number. Slowly, a golden mist arose from the bottom of the shoe, swirling around until it formed the vague outline of a leg.

Transfixed, Angel watched as the figure of Buffy slowly came into existence again--she was wearing her white prom dress, the one she had killed the Master in. And died in, a pesky little voice reminded. You held her in your arms, and she was dead, and you couldn't do anything about it. But the boy...Xander could. Angel choked back angry tears as the old jealousy that he had tried so hard to keep in check--resurfaced. His vision blurred in a red fog, as thin streams

of crimson leaked from his eyes.

>
 Concerned, the specter Buffy stepped forward, arms outstretched. A ghostly hand stroked his cheek affectionately. Angel stepped back in shock. Instead of it going through him, he could actually feel the warmth of her hand against his cheek. Sighing, he nuzzled into her hand...she was so real, and so warm.

> As her hand traced the tracks of his tears, she leaned closer so that Angel could feel her sweet breath caress his flesh.

"Xander?"

>
 And just like the first time he melded with Xander, Angel found his mouth opening and "Welcome back" coming out in hushed whisper.

>
 A gentle snort sounded at his side. Turning his head, Angel came face to face ...with himself.

>
 His doppelganger looked amused. He was holding Buffy's other hand (rather possessively) Angel thought ruefully. Smiling, Buffy pulled away to snuggle firmly in the other Angel's embrace. Stung, Angel averted his eyes. Is this what Xander felt every time he saw me and Buffy? I almost feel bad for him...

>
 It was the sound of her moan, and the scent of fresh blood that made him turn around. The other Angel had shifted in appearance, his feral eyes glinting above the crook of Buffy's neck. Her paleness only served to accentuate the deep crimson of her blood as it dripped lazily down the column of her neck and puddled above the swell of her breasts, staining the fabric of her dress a deep pink. Sheathing his fangs, Angelus grinned obscenely, Buffy's blood dripping from his chin. Wrapping his arms around the drained girl in a parody of a lover's embrace, the demon spoke.

>
 "Buffy's white knight...you still love her. It must just eat you up that I got there first."

>
 Angel flinched as the words were thrown back in his face. No wonder Xander hated him...Angel was unprepared for Angelus' next action. Snarling, Angelus captured Buffy's lips in one last brutal kiss before shoving the Slayer roughly toward him.

>
 "She tastes sooo good."

>
 Laughing, Angelus disappeared in a flash of red smoke. Angel cradled the tiny girl in his arms, numb with horror and regret. She was bleeding to death, he dully reflected, and there was nothing he could do.

>
 "Look, there's nothing you can do, Xander--I've made up my mind."

>
 These recollections are really quite jarring to a person's mental well being, Angel dryly thought. Or a vampire's, for that matter. One moment he was soaking in Buffy's blood, her waxy form stiffening within the cradle of his arms, and the next--he was in the school library, arguing with Buffy.

>
 When this was all over, he would have to have a serious talk with Xander about seeing a therapist.

>
 Smack!

>
 The sting of Buffy's slap across his cheek brought Angel crashing to reality. He stared at her, shock and hurt.

>
 "What the hell was that for?" The words burst out of his mouth before he could stop them.

>
 Folding her arms across her chest defensively, the petite blonde glared at him.

>
 "Xander Harris, I'm sick and tired of defending myself to you about Angel. I'm breaking it off with Scott and that's final."

>
 "Why? Do you have something against normal guys?"

>
 "I warned you, Xander..."

>
 "No, *you* listen, Buffy. It's enough that Dead Boy is back in

town, and we're all supposed to just jump up and forgive him with flowers. Scott really likes you and the fact that he's never tried to kill any of us only gives him more brownie points in my book. For God's sake, Scott is in love with you! Are you going to throw all that away for a killer?"

>
 Buffy opened her mouth to protest, but before Angel could blink, Xander was off and running again. The vampire could feel the tenseness in the mortal's muscles and was amazed that the boy hadn't collapsed from stress.

>
 "What is it about Angel, huh, Buffy? What is it about him that makes you want to give up your friends, your Watcher, your mother---everything? He's a vampire, Buffy! Just because Willow's curse worked at the last moment, doesn't mean it's permanent. Angelus could happen again. Are you going to let him kill one of *us* before you realize that you can't trust him?" The boy's voice grew hoarse with shouting.

>
 "Face it, Buffy. Your fairy tale is dead! Angel'll never die--but you will. Why don't you pick someone who can grow old with you?"

>
 The look that Buffy gave him was pure venom. Angel shivered at the ice cold expression in his Slayer's eyes. Her reply was slow and measured.

>
 "You mean...someone like you?"

>
 Xander gritted his teeth. His reply was equally part soft and steel.

>
 "No, not someone like me. The Buffy I fell in love with wasn't someone with such a low self esteem, that'd she," the teen's voice dropped into a hiss, "consider being a vampire's whore."

>
 The anger that surged through his veins at the moment--pure white hot flash that it burned him was astonishing. It mirrored the shock on Buffy's face.

>
 A crack appeared in her perfectly crafted facade, and her shoulders sagged a little. She turned away from him.

>
 "Xander...let me go. Just let me go."

>
 Buffy walked away. As the back of her head receded from his sight, Angel stood there immobilized. Xander had said those words to her? I'll kill him.

>
 As Angel allowed himself to fall into the darkness once more, he was assaulted by more images of Willow and Cordelia. But the majority of the visions in Xander's mind were of Buffy.

>
 Buffy. Smiling and laughing, or quietly thinking. The glorious sight of her beating bad guy ass. A rare moment of total contentment--Xander had catalogued every nuance of her being.

>
 "Love that turned into obsession."

>
 "Yeah, I'm sure you're familiar with the emotion."

>
 Angel blinked. He was back in his own body, thankfully--but Xander loomed over him now, dark hair slightly ruffled and standing up in angry spikes. His eyes were wild and red rimmed. And the cold metal of the gun barrel looked down at Angel.

>
 "What the HELL do you think you were doing, messing in my mind? Those were my memories, not yours to meddle with!"

>
 In a placating gesture, Angel held up his hands. Even though a bullet wouldn't kill him, a well placed shot *would* sting. Judging from Xander's facial expression, he wouldn't be shooting above the waist either.

>
 "Xander, you wouldn't talk to me...and I had to find out what happened between you and Buffy. Now I know," Angel's eyes transformed into a brilliant yellow and before Xander could properly react, Angel had grabbed his shoulders and flipped him. Scrambling to his feet, Angel ducked the first shot that Xander fired. A tiny spark in the

night was the only indication there had been a shot at all. Xander had equipped the gun with a silencer.

> Lashing out with a powerful roundhouse kick, the vampire disarmed the teenager--the gun flying out of Xander's nerveless fingers to rest a few feet away in the damp grass. Angel could tell by the sudden tightening of Xander's face that he had broken several fingers...that and the satisfying snap gave it away.

> Panting, Xander cradled his broken hand, glaring balefully at his older counterpart.
 "I would fuck off with the moral superiority, if I were you, Angel. What I said to Buffy was beyond wrong--don't you think if I had a chance I would take it all back? But..." Xander drew in a ragged breath, "I can't. I can't say sorry, and I can't do anything to fix it. AND I CAN'T LET HER GO!!!"

> The last was a shriek, it pierced the night air as surely as it chilled Angel's heart.

> He had seen this before, the mindless rage and fixation...after all, when he was Angelus, he had spent as many nights plotting to kill Buffy as he did lusting after her. Loathing her. For not letting him forget. The pain was unbearable, intolerable.

> And now it infected Xander.

> Angel didn't know what to say to the mortal. Oddly enough, he had empathized with him--but the ultimate person to decide his penance was himself. Breaking Xander's hand was enough, where ever the real Xander was now, he was beyond a plane of rational reasoning.

> The older man looked down at Xander one last time.

> "Was it just her love that you wanted?"

> Blinking, Xander looked at him in confusion. As the question sunk in, the boy smiled, a crazed smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

> "Her love? No...I wanted her. Everything...I wanted her to make me forget."
 Looking forlornly into the shadows, Xander sighed. His voice grew quieter.

> "But she didn't...she made it worse. I wanted to impress her so much and Willow didn't understand. Cordelia was no help either...I was never good enough for either of them."

> One last glimpse into Angel's hooded gaze.

> "You understand, when you came along, it didn't help matters any. Buffy wanted you, only you. So I became jealous. When you turned into Angelus, she never gave up on you. Not once. Not until you killed Miss Calendar anyway." Xander motioned at the stars above with his good hand. "I used to wish that Buffy would love me the way she loved you. There was a moment where I thought she might finally give me the time of day...but I was only her shoulder to cry on. And then she sent you to Hell. I never told her that Willow was going to make another attempt at the curse, you know that?" Xander's eyes had taken on a feverish glow, the sweat shining on his forehead. He trembled.

> "When she went away, I thought my world had ended. Three months of waiting, hoping, and being angry. Angry at myself and her--for just disappearing and not writing. I thought she was dead, or sick...but when she just showed up, I didn't know what to think. But you know what the sick thing is?"

> Xander exhaled.

> "I thought that three months was enough to get over her. To forgive myself and to forgive her. I was wrong. So horribly wrong. I've been searching for that, you know? Forgiveness. For everything I've done wrong--and for the fact that as much as I love Buffy..." Xander's voice broke, "I hate her."

> Angel was silent.

> "You may be asking yourself why do I hate her? Do I even have a

right to hate her? Of course not, Saint Buffy and all. But I hate her for the simple reason I love her...I can't get her out of my mind. I can't get her out of my mind...and I don't think I want to. Not a day goes by that I don't think about her. Cordy's suspicious, and she has a right to be...she thinks I'm hung up over Willow. What would she think if I told her I'm in love with a dead girl?" The teen laughed, the noise bitter and grating.

> "Good bye Angel. I need to say good bye to Buffy. Pay my respects...I'm sure you understand."

> The slight nod of the vampire's head was the only sign that he had heard Xander's request. Turning on his heel, he silently melted back into the shadows.

> As Angel walked away, he paused to look up at the stars briefly. Xander had made a wish that Buffy would love him on these, had he? What would he say if he knew that Angel had made many a similar wish--that he was 'normal'?

> The vampire waited.

> He didn't have to wait long. The evening breeze combined with his supernatural sense of smell brought back the tangy metallic scent of blood, freshly spilled.

> "Good bye, Xander."

> Angel walked faster. He needed to get roses for Buffy's grave.

>

~~~~~  
~~~<br>

> As he watched Angel walk away, Xander's attention wandered to the gun that glinted enticingly from the grass. Trembling, he reached out for the cool firmness of it. He had wanted forgiveness...but if he couldn't get it, well, he'd settle for oblivion then.

> Grasping it in his good hand, Xander cocked the trigger and said a silent prayer. He called up one last vision of his golden girl. Before the fall.
 Xander smiled.

>
 And pulled the trigger.

>
 To Have and To Hold

>
 I need to be cleansed

> It's time to make amends
 For all of the fun

> The damage is done
 And I feel diseased

> I'm down on my knees
 And I need forgiveness

> Someone to bear witness
 To the goodness within

> Beneath the sin
 Although I may flirt

> With all kinds of dirt
 To the point of disease

> Now I want release
 From all this decay

> Take it away
 And somewhere

> There's someone who cares
 With a heart of gold

> To have and to hold

End
file.